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NOAA Fisheries Seeks Comments on Impacts to Steller Sea Lions
Kodiak Launch Complex Requests an Exemption to MMPA

The National Marine Fisheries Service, an agency of the Commerce Department's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), is seeking comments on an application from Alaska Aerospace Development Corporation that would authorize the incidental take of Steller sea lions during rocket launches from the Kodiak Launch Complex on Kodiak Island, Alaska.

Scheduled launches may disturb marine mammals on Ugak Island, near the Kodiak launch site. As a result, the Launch Complex must obtain an exemption from the moratorium on marine mammal takes under the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA).

NOAA Fisheries will consider all comments before making a decision about whether to propose regulations. With an authorization, the MMPA allows the incidental disturbance of small numbers of marine mammals. NOAA fisheries must determine whether the launch activities will have minimal effect on the sea lions.

The potential for harassment of Steller sea lions can be reduced by requiring the launch complex to adopt measures that reduce the impact of the sights and sounds of launches on marine mammals. There could also be requirements for aerial surveys before and after the launches, as well as real-time video monitoring and rocket motor noise measurements at Steller sea lion locations.

NOAA will accept comments on the application and proposed authorization through Dec. 4, 2001. Comments should be addressed to Donna Wieting, Chief, Marine Mammal Division; Office of Protected Resources, NMFS; 1315 East-West Highway; Silver Spring, MD 20910. A copy of the application and Federal Register notice may be obtained by contacting the same office.